



YOUR LETTERS

MAILBOX

You're full of questions this month: why is Vista so expensive? When should I upgrade? Will it prevent the need for constant reboots? But, most importantly, where can I get a Dennis mug?

★ Star Letter Vista markup is extortionate in the UK



I know a lot has been said about the unfair pricing of Windows Vista in the UK compared to the US, but do you realise that if you have more than one family computer to upgrade in the US, you can get a retail boxed set of Windows Vista Ultimate Upgrade for around \$280 (around £143) plus whatever tax they charge?

Furthermore, because you live in the States you are entitled to upgrade two further computers with the Home Premium Edition for \$49 (around £25) each. Since I have three PCs I would have considered upgrading. But in the UK I think I could put Home Premium on each for around £450 total.

This makes the price difference between the UK and the US not 80 per cent, as I've read somewhere but, allowing for an exchange rate of about \$1.90 to £1, the difference is close to 125 per cent. And for this I don't get Ultimate on one of the PCs.

I for one won't be feeding Microsoft's coffers for some time to come. I'll wait until my hardware is due for replacement and get Windows Vista then.

Alan Francis

Microsoft's website is certainly friendlier for US customers than for those in the UK. Americans can buy Windows directly from Microsoft and currently there's a special offer that provides a discount. This means that, as you say, it is possible to buy a licence for the Ultimate version and pay less for Home Premium Edition licences. The UK site has no such online store or special offer.

If you bought one copy of Windows Vista Ultimate Upgrade and two copies of Windows Vista

Home Premium Edition Upgrade in the US it would cost you \$378, which is around £192. However, the same deal in the UK from a regular online store would cost around £470, which makes for a significantly worse deal for UK computer users.

One way to reduce the costs is to buy original equipment manufacturer (OEM) versions of the licences. Although you'll also have to buy some hardware at the same time, this would reduce the amount spent on Microsoft's operating systems to around £210 for a three-pack of Windows Vista Home Premium Edition Upgrade licences. Your original choice of one Windows Vista Ultimate Upgrade and two Windows Vista Home Premium Edition Upgrade OEM licences would cost £270.

However, before you rush out and take advantage of the OEM licence deals, read the next letter to find out about some of the disadvantages.



▲ Microsoft's US website currently has a special offer to upgrade to Vista that is not available in the UK

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OEM SOS



I built a new computer for my wife, purchasing all the necessary hardware from various sites on the internet, including an OEM copy of Windows XP Home Edition. I understand that buying an OEM version is perfectly OK if it's bought with new hardware.

We assembled the computer about three weeks ago, installed Windows and everything was fine. My wife activated Windows via the internet because she was fed up with the messages that kept popping up, reminding her that she had only 30 days remaining to activate.

The very next day the Abit motherboard stopped working. Ebayer requested that I return it, and agreed that it was dead but, at the time, did not have a replacement Socket 754 board, so I bought a similar Asus board from another website.

The computer was rebuilt, using all the original components plus the new motherboard, and all was well until today. My wife tried to re-activate Windows, got an error message and spent over an

hour on the phone to various departments of Microsoft, only to be told, quite adamantly, that we were not authorised Microsoft builders, the motherboard is not the original one and the licence expired with the dead motherboard. We are now left with a £60 coaster.

We are totally disgusted with the attitude of Microsoft, considering the profits it makes out of ordinary people such as ourselves. We are not trying to rip off anybody, we just want to use this software on one computer.



◀ OEM versions of Windows cost much less than retail versions, but the licence is more restrictive



Is there any way we can get full use of the software we have used for just over one day? Can you suggest other avenues we can pursue? Perhaps this will be a lesson to all other would-be system builders not to use the OEM version – or to switch to Linux!

Ken Dickinson

Microsoft says that "OEM software packs are intended for PC and server manufacturers or assemblers only. They are not intended for distribution to end-users unless the end-users are acting as local OEMs by assembling their own PC." In other words, you can use OEM software, but in doing so you become your own PC supplier, which has various implications, as we'll see below.

There are two main differences between OEM versions and retail copies. The first is that the retail version of XP costs around £160, while the OEM version costs just £60. The second, less-attractive difference is that the OEM version must be bought with some hardware, and is restricted to being used with that hardware.

By the letter of Microsoft's licence, you are not allowed to re-use an OEM copy of Windows on a different system to the one on which it was originally installed. A new motherboard counts as a new system. In our experience, it is possible to resurrect an OEM licence by explaining to Microsoft that your motherboard has died and you are simply replacing this component rather than building a new PC.

If you try again you may be luckier than last time. Microsoft does not consider upgrading a motherboard to be a valid reason to re-activate an OEM Windows licence. You must emphasise that you are replacing a dead motherboard with a similar model.

There are some other interesting differences between retail and OEM Windows licences that amateur PC builders should be aware of. OEM versions cannot be used to upgrade an earlier version of Windows and must be installed fresh on a clean hard disk. You can't transfer the licence to anyone else, so if you sell the PC you'll need to delete the Windows installation. Finally, if you need any kind of technical support, you get it from your PC supplier, which in this case is yourself.

Windows Vista has the same rules as XP. A retail copy of Windows Vista Home Premium costs around £190, while an OEM version costs around £75. If you intend to upgrade your PC often, it makes a lot of sense to bear the extra expense and buy a retail licence.

UPGRADE MANIA



I have every sympathy with Sandra Andrews, who wrote in *Letters*, *Shopper* April 2007 that she wanted to stick with Windows XP but felt she was on a treadmill of Microsoft upgrades. However, computers are not the only item to be constantly 'refreshed' by upgrades. It happens with cars, white goods, televisions and hi-fi equipment – and clothes too, if you count buying new fashions as upgrading. Such upgrading will turn out to be expensive only if you allow yourself to be dictated to.

I think we have to be sensible about which upgrades are worthwhile and fit our budget. I have used the beta version of Windows Vista



▲ Lack of security vulnerabilities mean washing machines don't need to be upgraded often

and think that it is a big improvement over Windows XP. Now that I have retired and want to do different things on my computer, I have decided to upgrade by selling my present computer to one of my daughters, who will continue with Windows XP. My new computer will have Windows Vista Home Premium.

Just because a company brings out a new washing machine doesn't mean we have to scrap our old one but, when the time comes to change because it is in our best interest, we may be glad that someone has developed an improved system.

When I first started using computers at the end of the 1980s I thought they were a huge improvement over the typewriter, gave desktop publishing a new lease of life, saved me hours of work and reduced costs. I haven't followed every upgrade since, just those I thought gave me an advantage. I think this is the key to making any change.

Cheer up, Sandra! You don't have to follow slavishly what a manufacturer happens to be doing just now. However, much as I love looking at vintage cars and remember my dad's Morris 10 with affection, I would much rather ride in my present-day vehicle.

Roger Dawson

We agree with the spirit of your letter. Upgrading for upgrading's sake is not only expensive but disruptive. Constant changes to a

computer's hardware rarely results in long-term stability. As you say, it makes sense to wait until you can see a serious benefit to upgrading and then take the plunge.

However, for many people there will be times when upgrading a home PC is necessary, even though they may not realise it. For example, Windows 98 users should upgrade because they no longer receive security updates from Microsoft and this operating system is potentially more vulnerable to viruses and hackers than more modern versions. Does every Windows 98 user know that they are vulnerable and should upgrade? Probably not. Some of them may not even be aware of Windows XP or Vista. Many people who use Windows all the time don't know what an 'operating system' is.

If you ignore the security aspect of this discussion (and very few would) and concentrate solely on productivity issues, it is true to say that upgrades are necessary only when they make a new task possible or an existing one easier. Someone who is successfully and happily running Windows 98 or Me has no real reason to upgrade. But connect this old PC to the internet and you really can't afford to forget about the security implications.

One day Microsoft will stop support for Windows XP and users will have to upgrade, disconnect from the internet or choose an alternative such as Linux. If you consider access to the internet to be one of the main reasons for owning a computer, your operating system will always have a limited life.

IT'S EASY BEING GREEN



I read with interest 'The Green Computing Guide', *Shopper* December 2006. With global warming, greenhouse gases, the Kyoto protocol, melting ice and rising sea levels due to excessive power consumption on everyone's minds, I thought I would mention that LocalCooling.com offers a route to greener computing and can also help cut your electricity bills.

LocalCooling is a free application that optimises the power consumption of a computer. Download it from LocalCooling.com and follow the onscreen prompts to install it. Using the program's simple interface you can



WRITE IN AND WIN!

Everyone runs out of disk space sooner or later. One way to solve the problem is to send us a great letter. That's because Western Digital has kindly agreed to furnish our Star Letter writers with an award-winning 500GB My Book Pro Edition hard disk. This external drive connects using USB2 or FireWire. It supports both FireWire 400 and 800, and can transfer data twice as fast as some other external disks we've tested. Honoured with *Shopper's* Best Buy award in the January 2007 issue, this sleek-looking unit comes complete with Retrospect backup software and even has an LED indicator on the front to display how much free disk space remains.



PLUS!

Every published letter-writer who provides their address also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug



**STAR
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set your default power settings to use the least possible amount of energy.

Now you may say that this is already possible through the Windows Control Panel, but LocalCooling has a more user-friendly interface, and as an added bonus it displays the amount of energy saved in kilowatt-hours. It can even show the equivalent amount of trees and oil.

There's an option to compare the savings you have amassed with other users to compete for a place in the Top 100 savers worldwide.

Thalamus

It's certainly an interesting idea and, although the LocalCooling site itself admits that PCs use relatively little power, they do contribute to the overall problem of energy consumption. For any readers who want to save power without installing extra software, you can make a big difference by turning off your monitor and PC when not using them.

The disadvantage to shutting down Windows is that it can take a long time to boot up again. Most notebooks and modern desktop PCs can be put into Hibernation mode, which uses no power but allows you to start the PC in a fraction of the time it takes to start from cold. Returning from the Standby mode is even faster but it uses a small amount of power.

Click the Start button and choose Turn Off Computer. If you see only the Stand By button, hold down the Shift key and it should turn into the Hibernation button. If this doesn't work, you need to enable Hibernation using Power Options in the Control Panel.

PUTTING THE BOOT IN



I would be interested to learn whether or not Windows Vista has overcome the need to reboot every time you change the Registry or a driver. I realise that rebooting is done to replace the details currently held in memory with the new ones, but it has always seemed to me that this should be something that could be done without rebooting.

If Windows Vista now demands a full gigabyte of memory, plus virtual memory on a hard disk, shouldn't shifting things about in memory be possible? It is one of the details that might persuade me to upgrade at that excessive price.

Frank Butler

It has been possible to change the Registry and drivers without rebooting since Windows 2000 and XP came along. You can even start and stop system services without having to reboot the PC. Nevertheless, sometimes Windows (or software you have installed on Windows) will request that you reboot. The reasons for this are varied.

The most valid reason is when Windows needs to replace or delete a file that is currently locked open. For example, installing some Windows updates requires replacing running system files such as DLLs and that is why Windows sometimes (but not always) nags you to reboot after updating. It's not a matter of how much memory the system has, it's down to changing a file that's in use.

Updating or adding new drivers for hardware can bring up messages requesting a reboot. This

is not always necessary, and many times you won't be prompted to reboot. However, whether or not you are asked to reboot, if you find that your new printer/webcam/scanner doesn't work, you know what to try next.

Sometimes, software will request a reboot just to be on the safe side. The same goes for some technical advice you might glean from the internet and other computer magazines, where many steps are followed by the inevitable "...and then reboot". In practice you can often keep running without rebooting.

For more information and an interesting utility that is designed to tell you when a reboot is really necessary, visit <http://exodusdev.com/products/whyreboot>.

DRUM SNARE



I've just read the letter 'Drum Roll' in *Letters, Shopper* March 2007, where Simon Whaley complains that he found it cheaper to buy a new printer than replace the drum unit of his old one. He requested that *Computer Shopper* print the costs of consumables in reviews.

You replied that you include the cost of consumables in the price-per-page running costs you publish, but that's missing the point. A business buying a printer is certainly going to want to know the running cost per page over the printer's lifetime, but what is the printer life? Is it until it requires maintenance such as a replacement drum?

When you're trying to decide which printer to buy, the cost of consumable items is important. It is not unreasonable to want to know these, and printing them in the

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The Editor is always pleased to receive ideas for articles, preferably sent first in outline form, with details of the author's background and, where available, samples of previously published work. We cannot, however, accept responsibility for unsolicited copy and it may take time for us to reply.

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magazine would make it far easier for us poor readers who won't need to look up prices on the internet.

So I implore *Computer Shopper* and all other PC magazines to print the cost of purchasing all consumables – not just the toner or ink – for all printers.

Paul Winstone

The reason we print running costs the way we do is to make consumable cost comparisons easier. Printers have several consumables such as toners and photoconductor drums. Starter consumables provided with printers typically have shorter lifetimes than off-the-shelf replacements. Replacement toners often come in standard and long-life versions. The printer itself will generally last considerably longer than its consumables, possibly for as many as several hundred thousand pages in the case of a workgroup laser.

All this makes calculating the total cost of ownership (TCO) complicated. We could print a full price list of all variants of all consumables complete with individual lifetimes. However, this would take up a huge amount of space and leave readers with the headache of working out their TCO.

Instead, we print running costs that incorporate the price of all consumables. We make a few assumptions on how you'll use your printer, but they're consistent and fully documented on our website (www.computershopper.co.uk/howwetest). Finally, in printer Labs tests we print three TCOs based on different levels of usage, allowing you to compare the figures most representative of your workload.

A MUG'S GAME



As a reader of *Shopper* for the past 10 years, I count myself as one of the faithful. As a devotee to the magazine, I am (probably a little scarily) proud of my collection of three *Shopper* mugs. Imagine my surprise when I saw in *How It Works*, April 2007, the Holy Grail itself: the much sought-after Dennis Publishing mug.

How could you mock me so by showing it but not sharing it? Erm... please could I have one?

Simon Grimshaw

Not only do Dennis Publishing mugs exist, but they come in different colours too (see below). However, if we were to send any of these superior mugs to readers we would have to drink our tea from mere *Computer Shopper* mugs, and that's just not happening, Simon. Console yourself with the thought that, having had a letter published here once again, and having given us your address, you will now have a full set of four *Shopper* mugs. ☺



▲ Dennis mugs provide a deluxe beverage experience – but not for the likes of you

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